

2009 California Halibut Fact Sheet

Paralichthys californicus

Current Rules and Regulations

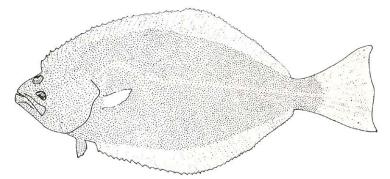
- √ 22 in. minimum size
- √ 3 fish bag and possession limit north of Pt. Sur, Monterey County
- √ 5 fish bag and possession limit south of Pt. Sur, Monterey County
- ✓ A Bay-Delta Sport Fishing Enhancement Stamp (B-DSFES) is required for all tidal waters east of the Golden Gate Bridge and west of the Carquinez Bridge. One rod per angler in the B-DSFES area. See the DFG Web site for a more complete description of where the B-DSFES is required.

No more than **one** daily bag limit may be taken or possessed by any one person, regardless of whether the fish are fresh, frozen, or otherwise preserved. See CCR Title 14 sections 1.17, 7.00, 7.50(a), 27.60(c) and 195. For more complete rules and regulations regarding bag and possession limits and other fishing regulations, go to: **www.dfg.ca.gov/marine**.

California Halibut Facts

- Can be either right- or left-eyed (both eyes on one side of the head)
- Can grow up to 5 ft long
- Range from Quillayute River, WA to Magdalena Bay, Mexico
- Young hatch with eyes on each side of the head. One eye migrates to the other side as the young mature and the fish settle near the sea floor.
- California halibut are predatory fisheaters. Their prey also includes crustaceans and mollusks.
- Female California halibut grow faster than male California halibut. A 22 in. female fish is about 5 years old and a 22 in. male is about 7 years old.
- 50 percent of male California halibut can reproduce at 9 in. or 2 years.
- 50 percent of female California halibut can reproduce at 18.5 in. or 4 years.





DFG artwork by D. Miller, R.N. Lea

Q & A: California Halibut

Q) What is the difference between Pacific and California halibut?

A) California halibut have less than 77 dorsal soft rays, and the eyes may be on the left or right side of the head; Pacific halibut have more than 80 dorsal soft rays, and the eyes are always on the right side of the head. Pacific halibut are typically caught in deep water. The season for Pacific halibut is May 1 through Oct. 31. There is no minimum size limit for Pacific halibut, and the limit is 1 in possession.

Q) Will salt water rust out a fish hook?

A) No. Modern hooks are stainless or carbon steel. If left inside a fish they will likely be pushed through the digestive system and may damage organs.

Q) How do I prevent tail splitting?

A) Try not to land undersized fish. Bring it to the side of the boat and release the fish from there. If you do land a "shaker," use a soft net with the smallest mesh available. Tail splits, if not severe, will heal, but make the fish susceptible to fin rot.

Q) Is it legal to use a treble hook?

A) Yes, but treble hooks may make releasing halibut and other finfish difficult.

Q) Are fish in San Francisco Bay safe to eat?

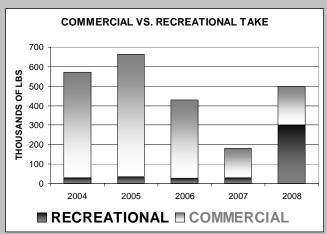
A) The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) recommends that men over 17 and women over 45 consume no more than 2 servings/month of San Francisco Bay sport fish and consume no striped bass over 35 in. OEHHA recommends that women ages 18 to 45 and children under 17 consume no more than 1 serving/month of San Francisco Bay sport fish and no striped bass over 27 in. These are interim advisories as a final state advisory is being developed. Call (510) 622-3170 or visit www.oehha.ca.gov for the most up-to-date recommendations.



DFG State Finfish Management Project

The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) State Managed Finfish Project

collects data and monitors important finfish species in California. Six biologists work on the project throughout the state. Biologists collect data on length, weight, sex ratios, and age structure of California halibut populations. These data are used to help manage the fishery.



Data from San Mateo to Sonoma Co.

www.recfin.ora

Commercial vs. Recreational

Recreational anglers often wonder how their catch compares with the commercial catch. From 2004 to 2007 recreational take was 5 to 15 percent of the total catch in the greater Bay Area. In 2008, however, recreational anglers took 60 percent of the total catch.

The graph above compares total commercial catch (trawl and hook-and-line) with total recreational catch. Recreational catch data are available to the public at www.recfin.org. Data are collected by California Recreational Fisheries Survey program samplers, who interview anglers returning from fishing trips. Commercial catch records are maintained by the DFG in the form of landing receipts. Every time a fish is sold, a receipt records the weight, general location where caught, and port of landing.

The recreational success seen in 2008 is expected to continue in 2009. Effort for California halibut has increased due to the salmon season closure. Catch rates have increased due in part to a large recruitment event in 2003. Many female fish that recruited in 2003 were of legal size (22 in.) in 2008. In 2009/10 many of the males born in 2003 should reach minimum legal size.

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California Halibut Fishery in SF Bay Area

California halibut were first described in the bay in 1859 and have been a staple for anglers for the greater part of the last century. Although they range north to Washington, they are most abundant south of Bodega Bay. San Francisco Bay anglers may enjoy California halibut fishing year-round. Commercial and recreational anglers may catch them with hook-and-line gear within and outside the bay. Permitted commercial fishermen may catch California halibut with trawl nets outside of State waters.

DFG Monitoring

California halibut settle, or 'recruit', into the Bay as young-ofthe-year (YOY) and juveniles. They become available to fishermen years later, after they reach minimum legal size. Recruitment appears to be cyclical, with some years having many YOY and other years having very few. The DFG's Bay-Delta Region monitors YOY in monthly otter trawl studies. The cyclical nature of recruitment and recruitment success may be affected by warm water events. Other factors that affect recruitment include availability of mature females, food and water quality.

In past years DFG biologists have tagged halibut with small yellow tags to track movement and growth rates. California halibut may migrate (one fish traveled 180 miles) though most fish appear to stay close to home. If you find a fish with a tag, note the location where caught, the day, length and the tag number. The tag will have a phone number on it or you may bring the information to a DFG office.

Biologists can tell how old a fish is by looking at bones called otoliths located in the fish's head. Fish age can be determined by slicing through otoliths and counting the concentric growth rings, similar to the growth rings in a tree. Project biologists collect ototliths when possible.

Project biologists are currently studying how fishing gear may impact the fishery. Type of hook used and the location of hooking may determine the survival rate of released halibut.

Stock Assessment

A statewide California halibut stock assessment is under way, to be completed by 2010. Biomass (total amount of fish) will be estimated, and breeding rates, recruitment, historical and current take, age structure and migration data will be used to assess the status of the California halibut resource.

Further Reading

DFG Fish Bulletin 174 is available online at http://oac.cdlib.org/